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An equitable system of income distribution is needed for the many indigent persons unable to benefit from skill enrichment programs, full employment, or job upgrading. Such persons include the aged, mothers with dependent children, and physically or mentally ill individuals. Present public welfare departments, which offer a form of income distribution, are inadequate because they do not try to reach the many people eligible for their services. Also, those people who do receive welfare are demoralized by inadequate budgets and by such administrative practices as the post-midnight investigations of clients' homes. The lives of these poor are virtually controlled by a 'professional elite' who run the welfare department and other bureaucratic public agencies like the housing authority and the schools. It is particularly important for educators to realize that welfare children, burdened by both psychological degradation and material deprivation, are not likely to learn in school. (LB)

Education and Problems of Poverty

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THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

I would like to make several what seem to me to be very simple points today about education and about the problem of poverty in the United States. I want to begin somewhat generally and then toward the close of my remarks try to indicate some of the ways in which what I am saying is relevant to the field of education, though I don't by any means pretend to know or understand the problems which you confront in a classroom.

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We are at a time in this country when there is a great deal of concern about poverty on the national agenda. The President and many other groups have committed themselves to an abolition of it. And in the strategy by which poverty is being attacked, education figures very prominently. We have, from the outset of the poverty program, had a mushrooming of programs like Head Start, educational programs for out of school unemployed youth, and the like. And, as you, I am sure, are aware, in recent months there has been increased pressure on the Congress and on those who administer the Anti-Poverty Program to shift increasing amounts, increasing proportions of the poverty funds, particularly to Head Start, but to other types of remedial educational programs as well, which attests to not merely the general success of that program but to the heightened awareness of Americans to the importance of education generally.

OEO, has in one statement after another, defined itself and its program strategy as veering away from one of handouts.

Mr. Schriver says time and again, in public statements, that the OEO program is not a new version of handout programs; it's not a new version of the dole; it's not a new version of public welfare; but is rather an effort to extend to all Americans, chiefly, of course, young Americans, a new program of opportunity by which they can presumably acquire the skills necessary to function competently in our very highly specialized and technological society, and through this competent functioning to become financially self-sufficient.

It is, in short, a program which is very much in the American tradition of self-help, of upward mobility, of self-alliance, of preparing oneself to compete against other men for the goods of this world.

I am very much in sympathy with that kind of approach, and particularly with the important role of education in it.

Having said that, however, I now want to make a series of remarks which may at first blush seem to you entirely contradictory. Though I hope as I now proceed that you will remember that I have already stated and tried to underline the fundamental importance which I do believe education has to the solution, in the long run, over the next three to five generations, of the poverty problem.

But it's not the next three to five generations that I will discuss now, and that is, after all, the period of time it takes, or has taken, in this country, for most poor groups to lift themselves, whether it's the Irish, or the Southern Italian, or the East European Jew, or whatever, who came to our shores in great number, that was

roughly the period of time that it took most of those groups, as someone said earlier, to claw their way upward into a reasonably decent standard of living, and a reasonable degree of economic security. I want to talk about groups that are going to make that rise; I want to talk about people who are poor now, and make the very simple point that a strategy which depends upon equipping people with skills, educational and occupational skills, is at best a long-range one, and that such a strategy, in effect, abandons the great bulk of people who are already poor, and who will be poor in the next generatiom, and in the one beyond that.

Before I begin, let me note that some groups in our society have not risen from poverty merely through the path, or by the route of individual mobility. One thinks, for example, of the labor movement in this country. When men in the factory system, whether in the steel mills, the rubber plants, or the automobile shops, or in the mines, when these men finally began to recognize that in their labor there was blatent power, which, if they organized, collectively, and then withdrew that labor from the factory system - when they began to realize that, and when they, in fact, began to withdraw their labor, at first in very bloody strikes and thereafter in somewhat more peaceful ones under Government regulation and supervision, they did not bargain for individual mobility. They did not ask of management that they be given skills upgrading programs; they did not ask for "head start" programs for their children; they did not ask for out-of-school employment programs for out-of-school unemployed youth; they asked for higher wages. They asked for fringe benefits, particularly, of course, pensions to give them some security in old age. They asked for some surcease from the

arbitrary powers of management to hire and fire at will. They asked, in short, for some form of job tenure, some form of job security, which came to be known by the term seniority. They asked, in short, not for the opportunity for one worker to advance his interests over those of another worker, they asked not for the opportunity for one man to have great competitive advantage over another; instead, they asked that workers as a whole be elevated by altering their wages as a whole, and their conditions of work as a whole. They asked, in short, for upward mobility en masse. They asked that they be lifted as a group from deprivation.

This is merely to make the point that individual mobility, which is the guiding motif of our current attack upon poverty, is not the only way in which people have in the past lifted themselves from poverty, nor I suspect is it the only way that one has to conceive of the solution to poverty coming in the future.

Let us, having made that point, pause for a moment, and just look at the characteristics of people who are poor and as we look very briefly at those characteristics, ask ourselves what proportion of the population that is poor now, or that is likely to be poor in the next generation -- what proportion of that population can we effectively expect to reach through the educational apparatus, no matter what resources might be made available to us, no matter how one might expand the Head Start Program, no matter how one might pump money into the new Education Act legislation, etc.

The United States Government, in defining poverty, uses now what is called a variable poverty definition. It varies by two criteria.

One is whether the family is rural or urban, and the other is roughly the family size - the number of people and, to some extent, their ages. For each family size the definition is slightly different, and whether it is a family in a rural or a non-farm area is slightly different. To give you some illustrative notion of the figures they use, for a family of four, consisting of 2 adults and 2 children under 6, the United States Government defines such a family, in an urban area, as being poor if it has a cash income of less than $3,100 a year. The same family in a rural area is defined as being poor if it has a cash income of less than $1,860. Those are, by no means, generous definitions. I'm sure you would agree. Using those definitions, and scaling them off for families of size 5, size 6, etc., the number of people in this country who are poor is about 35- million. Of those 35-million people, approximately 5-million are what are called, in the United States Census, unrelated. That means they do not live in a family unit. The bulk of them, of course, are aged, although there are some younger, single people, or persons whose spouses have died or something of that sort, in that figure as well. But the bulk are aged. Now, it is self-evident, hardly needs to be argued, that the aged are not going to be lifted from poverty either now or in any future generation, by programs designed to enhance their skills. They are obviously out of the market place, and the solution to their problem is not to be found by facilitating their re-entry to it. They need money. They need higher Social Security payments. They need new legislation which would expand Social Security to all aged, whether or not they were gainfully employed. They need, in short, income redistribution.

Of the remaining 30-million, they are distributed among 7.2 - million families. One quarter of those families, or approximately

1.8 - million,families in the United States, under the poverty line, are headed by females. Those on-quarter of all families contain one-third of all individuals who are poor. They are, in short, large families. Larger than families headed by males that are similarly below the poverty line.

It's difficult to see how those families, as units, as families, are going to be lifted from poverty now, or at any point in the foreseeable future by skills upgrading programs, by full employment, by public works, by a higher minimum wage, or by any other measure which affects working conditions. For these, by definition, are women who are in essentially mothering and nurturing roles. They are not in the market place, and it is difficult to imagine why anyone would want them in the market place. For then the country would be confronted with the large task of caring for their children.

If these families are to be lifted from poverty, they, too, require income. They don't require skills upgrading; they will not be helped by all of the various measures that we think of when we think of helping people from poverty - minimum wage legislation and the like. They can only be aided by a new Federal program of income distribution.

Well, there are a great many families that are poor, whose poverty results from the ill health, either physical or mental, of the head of the household. There are a great many men in this country who have familial responsibilities who are unable, for reasons of health, to support adequately their wives and their children.

Now, it is, of course, true that there are many other families under the poverty line that can be effectively helped by job upgrading

programs, by going back to school, and, in effect, learning new skills, by minimum wage legislation and the like. Of those 7.2- million families, half of them are headed by males who worked full-time for the year preceding the last Census -- these figures are all based on the 1960 Census. They worked full-time and yet earned less than the minimum which defines them as in poverty. Well, they are obviously working for very little money, and many of them would be effectively helped by minimum wage legislation, by job upgrading, by full employment and programs of that sort. My point here is not in any sense to minimize the importance of such measures, educational and otherwise, but it is to suggest that there are very substantial numbers of people, running into the millions in this country, who will not be in the least bit affected by the programs that are now being championed across the land. These groups are only going to be helped, in the short run, at least, by income distribution.

Well, we have an income distribution program in this country. We call it public welfare, and it's about public welfare that I want to say a few words today. For aside from the fact that I think it is a subject that too few people know much about, I also think it may have some importance for those of you who teach in the ghetto school, whose classrooms may, to a greater or lesser extent, be populated by youngsters whose survival depends upon the securing and the maintaining of eligibility for public welfare benefits. What kind of an income distribution mechanism is public welfare?

There are probably not two people in this room who have even the barest knowledge of our public welfare system, despite the fact that many of you may know a great many youngsters who subsist on the welfare roles.

You know, of course, that public welfare is a subject of great public concern, particularly for taxpayers, who are concerned with the mounting costs and the mounting rolls. In New York City today, for example, there are about 525,000 people who are on the welfare rolls. The rolls change constantly. That's an average daily figure, which means that in the course of a year, there are probably somewhere closer to 700,000 people who at one time or another, in the course of a year, are on public welfare.

The great bulk of those who are on welfare are on, more or less permanently. This program now costs, in the City of New York, an amount in excess of $600-million; it is second in cost only to the cost of public education. These two facts, the numbers of people on welfare, and the costs are enough to create one front page story after another, because of the great concern people have about taxes, and also about the concern people have that welfare in some fashion or another destroys people. It is often contended that welfare blunts their incentive, destroys their ambition. It is said that if people are left to languish on the rolls, they, then, in effect, become incapacitated for any competitive adjustment at a future time. The great concern in this regard is of course, expressed with respect to children - that if children are raised in welfare families, they are somehow bound to turn out to be indolent, indigent, and otherwise morally and psychologically destroyed.

Well, there is a sense in which the welfare system destroys people, but it is not, I think, in the way that it is popularly defined. And I hope in the ensuing remarks to make that point vivid.

Let me begin by noting certain other statistics that you

will not find on the front pages of the newspapers; indeed, you will not find them anywhere.

In 1960, there were about 325,000 people in this City who were on public welfare. Together with a colleague, I ran some data, using some special tabulations of family income by family size, which we secured from the United States Census Bureau. We took the welfare eligibility levels for basic food and rent. In that year, for example, a family of four, if it had no income at all, was eligible for a basic food and rent grant, which comes by check every 15 days, amounting, over the space of a year, to $2,040. And for a family of five slightly more; a family of three slightly less, and so forth.

We ran off, in that same year, income data for the City of New York, by family size, and were startled to find that there were over 700,000 individuals in the City of New York who reported to the Census income, total annual income, less than the amount they would have received had they been on the welfare roles.

We, then, calculated the numbers of people who reported incomes less than 80% of the eligibility levels for public welfare, and were amazed to find that there were 500,000 individuals, 516,000 individuals, living alone or in families, with incomes below the eligibility levels. We then calculated it for people who reported income less than 50% of what they would have earned had they been on the welfare rolls, and found some 200,000 individuals in the City of New York.

We have since made similar calculations for the City of Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, and we now have a man in Los Angeles

It's not so surprising because if there is one thing that public welfare departments do not do, it is to advertise for business.

One thinks, by contrast, of the vast campaign just mounted by the Federal Government to secure to the rolls the aged for the Medicare Program. Indeed, they even hired aged people with Anti-Poverty funds to go out into the slums and knock on the doors, the attic doors, the single rooms, the one room apartment houses, and so on, to try to find people to inform them of this program, and to stimulate, encourage, indeed, to drag them to the nearest office to get their names on their rolls so that they would become eligible for these benefits.

Who advertises for public welfare? Have you ever seen an advertisement?

Well, you've seen advertisements for Social Security. If you pick up any evening newspaper in this country, you are likely to find a regular Social Security column, questions and answers. I am a widow and my husband does, etc., etc., am I eligible or am I not? All kinds of technical and legalistic questions are answered, and people are encouraged to go to the nearest Social Security office for further information. And the address is given. And brochures are published and distributed. People are, in short, under the Social Security system, constantly being informed of their rights, and encouraged by their Government, both local and Federal, to take advantage of those rights. The reverse has been the case, historically, where public welfare is concerned.

Let us consider the question of special grants. In New York City, what is called a fully maintaining grant for a welfare family is made up of two parts. One part is the basic food and rent grant, which I

they do in order to purchase heavier clothing and things of that sort, is to steal from the food budget. And in stealing from the food budget, they are stealing from the mouths of the children who populate your classrooms.

And I say "stealing" -- obviously, I don't mean it quite the way I say it. They are forced to steal from the food budget.

Now, the laws of this State state quite clearly that welfare clients are to be brought to a minimum standard of living. Our public welfare system is a system which is constantly under attack by hostile forces, by the politically conservative forces, or liberal forces who are equally concerned about taxes, and are concerned about what they define as the moral corruption of people on welfare. Always ignoring, year after year, the fact that 90% of the people on public welfare are either aged, women, or children under the age of 18. There are practically no persons on public welfare who are employable, if by employable you mean persons who are either male, and of age, or women who have no dependents. The great bulk of people on public welfare, as you know, in a city like this, are Negro and Puerto Rican, women with children -- they're female-headed families.

Public welfare, despite the fact that it was established, and as the law will state, that it is reponsible for maintaining people at a minimum level, is subject to all manner of political pressure, and that pressure adds up to keep the cost down. And so a whole series of practices grow up in the welfare system which are designed, to keep the cost down not consciously -- I speak now of no conspiracy -- most of the people who run the welfare systems of this country are decent people. They work, like educators, in a very difficult political milieu. And that milieu

have already referred to. That grant, however, is not supposed, and does not, in fact, contain any funds for clothing beyond very light clothing, underclothes, socks, and things of that sort. If one wants or needs heavy clothing, overcoats, galoshes, scarves, hats and the like, one has to make special application, special forms, and a special series of decisions have to be made by functionaries in the welfare system. If one needs household furnishings, dishes, bedding, mattresses, if one needs a baby carriage, if one has a new baby and needs a layette, if one needs any one of a number of those furnishings which simple decency requires that people own, one has to make special application to the Welfare Department.

Now, we all know the costs of heavy clothing, and we know the costs of dining room chairs, kitchen chairs; we know the cost of refrigerators; we know the cost of even the cheapest washing machine; we know what a decent mattress costs; we know what towels and blankets and pillows cost. We also know that most families that are poor do not possess these items of clothing, and these items of household furnishings. No one has been in a slum and ghetto home, of a welfare recipient, can come away without recognizing that there are very severe clothing and household furnishing deprivations. What, then, in 1965, did the Department of Welfare of the City of New York expend per person on the welfare rolls for that entire year for both heavy clothing and household furnishings? $40 per person per year, in the City of New York. A total of $19.6 million out of their overall budget which, in 1965, slightly exceeded $500 million.

In other words, their basic expenditures go into the food and rent grants. If people need anything beyond that what do they do? What

makes them do things both consciously and unwittingly that, as decent human beings, they would prefer otherwise.

Nevertheless, they are forced into a whole series of practices which have the effect of violating the rights of the people with whom they deal. One of the most flagrant of these is what is known as the midnight raid. And I'm sure that's a phrase that all of you are familiar with. It's an investigatory procedure -- every Welfare Department has what it calls a Frauds Division -- it's an investigatory procedure by which frauds investigators are sent out, after midnight, and before the hour of six. Without benefit of warrant, they will invade the home of a welfare recipient, in search of some evidence of male attire, or evidence of child neglect, or something of that sort. In the State of California several years ago - the State of California, by the way, has mass midnight raids, and on certain designated nights they sent out up to 3,000 of their investigators across the State to invade homes -- in that State several years ago, a welfare worker declined to participate in such a raid, and was promptly dismissed. He has been, for the past three years, appealing, through the courts of California; he lost in the lower courts; he's appealing on the grounds that he cannot be fired from a governmental position for refusing to violate the constitutional rights of a citizen. There's every reason to suppose that although he's lost the case in the lower courts that he will win it in the Federal courts, and it's about ready now to leave the State courts and go into the Federal courts.

This is merely one, but there are dozens of practices which are supported either by statute or by administrative custom, which

constitute the most flagrant violation of the rights of that category of our citizens who are lawfully entitled to welfare but who are treated as if they have no rights at all.

Well, why should educators be concerned about these material deprivations. I estimate, incidentally, that if the welfare system in this City properly, but only minimally, clothed welfare clients, particularly children, and provided the most minimal furnishings for their homes, that the cost, the first year, would run somewhere in the neighborhood of $300 - million. That gives some idea of the extent to which welfare clients are being cheated, routinely, regularly, not in occasional cases, but across-the-board, of benefits to which they are entitled under law. And that is to say nothing about that vast number of people in the broader community who are eligible for welfare benefits but who are not on the rolls because they either are unaware of their eligibility, as welfare makes no effort to inform people of eligibility criteria, or because they are intimidated and shamed and, therefore, reluctant to apply for that sustenance which society has presumably provided for them. The cost to cities like New York of a massive recruitment program would be little short of phenomenal.

Well, why should educators be concerned about this?

Well, there is, and I assume that all educators are concerned with this, a very fundamental issue of rights here. I often hear it said, and I'm sure you do, too, that low income parents are uninterested in education, and one index that's given of that is the fact that they never appear at the school. They don't come to PTA meetings, they don't come to see the teacher, the principal, at least not as frequently as is the case with middle class parents. Well, part of the reason for that may be

an attitude, a feeling about public agencies which is engendered by the whole experience of being low income people in this society. Just think for a moment of the range of public agencies which have decisive powers in the lives of the low income person. Public welfare controls the very standard of living of these families. The amount of food that's on the table; the amount they can pay for rent. It controls the amounts of money they have for clothing and furnishings. Those are pretty basic decisions in anybody's life.

Well, think of code enforcement agencies, which are responsible, under law, to see to it that people live in minimally decent habitats, that there isn't raw sewage exposed; that people are not subject to the ravages of vermin; that there is heat and hot water; and yet no one, who has any familiarity with the slum neighborhood, could say that our code enforcement agencies are in the least bit effective. For, in the final analysis, they, too, are subject to the same political pressures which impinge upon our departments of welfare; landlord groups, highly organized, articulate groups with resources to mount political pressure, with lawyers to defend their interests and to assert them in the courts; indeed, the whole apparatus of our housing courts is so flagrantly biased, in the interest of landlords, and has been traditionally, that it is very difficult for tenants, particularly those without competent, adequate legal counsel, to assert even the most minimal rights in transactions with landlords.

Or take even the school system. I have sat in not a few school suspension hearings on the Lower East Side in connection with the Mobilization For Youth program, and I'm impressed in those situations with how quickly professional people, either educators, social workers, or

whatever, came to believe that in the final analysis their professional judgments are superior to others. And so the typical suspension hearing, as the typical hearing in welfare, or the typical tenant review board hearing in public housing another huge governmental agency which has vast and authoritarian controls over low income families -- I've always been impressed with these school suspension hearings, a long open table, mahogany table, with the Assistant Superintendent of Schools at one end, and flanked on the left and right, a virtual armada of experts: the teacher, the guidance counselor, the Bureau of Attendance Officer, perhaps the principal, and God only knows what other specialists and experts; and at the other end of the table, Mrs. Rodriguez and her son, Juan. It is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a very even battle. And when issues of fact are put forward in the absence of any kind of advocate for Mrs. Rodriguez, the evidence is taken for granted, and the hearing comes down to a question of what is in the "best interests of the child". Well, what is in a child's best interests is subject to some difference of opinion, depending upon where you stand. And it could be argued that professionals are not necessarily, and infallibly, the best definers of those interests. I dare say the best of us, and I speak now not to you as educators, but to all of us as professionals -- I'm a professional social worker, and I could just as easily draw my examples from that field; indeed, when I speak of public welfare, I'm talking about a system in which my field has deep penetration -- but I'm talking noW about professionals generally.

Even the best professional, in any large public system, is inevitably influenced by certain organizational interests. We have, for

for example, in the school system, a discipline problem, which I've heard some comment about today. We have our careers there. We have all manner of management problems which may influence our decisions just as much as some more abstract and altruistic concern for the interests of a particular child. It strikes me as no accident, for example, that most children suspended from school are either Negro or Puerto Rican, and they are inevitably poor. We have other ways of dealing with youngsters who are difficult but who are not poor. We deal with parents; we negotiate an arrangement where the child is taken from school and put into a military academy or some other kind of situation. But that's a situation in which the parent exercises some control over the destiny of his child. What one is impressed with in many school suspension hearings, and in many other hearing procedures in the agencies of the welfare state, is the fact that control is vested almost totally in the hands of a professional elite who, by virtue of their superior academic credentials, and their legal authority within a system, take unto themselves to be prosecutor, judge and jury.

Well, we may some day recognize that the rights of people, whether it's in a public welfare hearing, or a public housing authority tenant review board hearing, or a public school suspension hearing, that these situations call for the same protections as in the criminal courts of the land. We may come to recognize that a school, and a public welfare department, and a public housing authority, exercise a vast power in the lives of people, and that a series of negative decisions by such agencies can destroy a family just as quickly as a verdict of lifelong imprisonment. Now, these are families that are already seriously under-

mined by economic deprivation, and if they are then cast out of public housing, in an eviction proceeding, where there was no due process protection, or their children are cast out of school, if they find it impossible to assert their lawful rights with respect to public welfare, all of this can virtually destroy a family, whose basic stability may already seriously be undermined by deprivation.

Well, I suggest to you that one possible reason that people from the low income sectors of this society do not engage easily with you, you as representatives of a huge and powerful public agency, is partly because they feel intimidated by these huge, powerful, centralized, bureaucratic systems. They feel that they have no rights, that they cannot assert what theoretical rights they may be said to have. And, under these conditions, do not feel free to enter, with any sense of dignity, with any sense of self-esteem, into relationships with these powerful figures who control the lives of their children, and their lives more generally.

I suggest, in short, that many low income people may have a certain psychological sense of powerlessness in grappling with the agents of our government in its many forms, who affect them so fundamentally.

That would seem to me to suggest, then, that educators, both in their procedures for dealing with people, and in the classroom, ought to ask the extent to which peoples' rights are violated under the guise of professionalism, and ought to encourage people to know what their rights are, and to feel free in asserting them, and that somehow might have a substantial impact on the relationship between all public agencies--not merely the public school -- and low income people.

Take the issue of sustenance. Why should a classroom teacher

be concerned with the fact that thousands and thousands of low income people in this City are being unlawfully deprived of welfare benefits. Children who come to school in clothing of which they are ashamed are not likely to be the most active participants in the educational process. Children who have not a few coins to jingle in their pockets so that they can go out after school and buy an ice cream cone, like other children, may somehow or another, feel intimidated, may feel a loss of self-esteem, a sense of special status; and an invidious status at that, which may affect the way they behave at school, and children who come to school hungry, underfed, undernourished, are not likely to be capable of the same educational stimulation as children who are fed and fed well.

I also think many of these children, and here I think there is a very clear case to be made for educators to be concerned with welfare, perhaps even learn a bit about it -- many of these children suffer a loss of self-esteem because they are "welfare families". This loss of self-esteem is engendered basically by the whole American attitude toward public welfare, that people who are financially dependent are without virtue, are in some sense or another morally defective. They do not possess the character, the morality, the personality, the structure, and so forth, of those of us who have made it. And I dare say the attitudes of most teachers, as indeed the attitudes of most social workers, tend to re-enforce this. I am sure that all of you are for the American dream, and you see in your chosen occupation an opportunity to try to increase the chances for all of the children who come to your classroom to share this American dream. And that's good. I have no quarrel with that. I have no quarrel with it providing we don't assume that those people in our society who, by reason of discrimination and other factors, have been

barred from that dream, are not made then to feel the added penalty of psychological degradation. And it's that latter point that I think is of particular importance for teachers.

Let me tell you of an incident that I was involved in several weeks ago. I am a close friend of the Executive Director of Haryou Act in Central Harlem and have always believed that the development of organizations like Haryou Act, ethnic institutions in the ghetto, is among the first priorities for building and strengthening the institutions of the ghetto to deal with their own problems.

And I frequently go to Haryou to speak to various groups, because I am, as Haryou has come to know, one of its staunch advocates.

I was asked recently to come to speak to a group of 150 teenagers, male and female, roughly between the ages of 16 and 20, who had been brought together, by Haryou, as part of a community action program. These teenagers were to be trained to participate in the life of their community, to take an active role in certain programs which the staff is going to help them to organize. I spoke to the group for about 10 minutes, making certain points about Haryou Act itself, and then said to them that before I went out, I would like to have some idea of what they were thinking about as forms of action. And these were very poor youngsters. They were extremely lively, and within 15 minutes I had heard from at least 30 different youngsters in the audience, that they were thinking about starting a program to clean up the parks; they were thinking about a program to try to help poor families in the neighborhood to deal more adequately with their landlords; they were thinking about trying to get

parents involved in parent education -- parent-teacher programs; and so forth and so forth. After having heard of 30 programs, I finally said to them, I am interested to note that you have mentioned virtually every public agency in our municipality, and you're thinking about programs directed to those agencies, whether the schools or the rent rehabilitation administration, or the park department, and yet you have not mentioned the one governmental agency which probably touches every one of you in this room -- not to speak of thousands and thousands in Harlem. And there was an absolute silence, and no one could think of it. And I finally said, public welfare. And the moment I said that, all eyes were averted; there was a rippling giggle through the audience, and blush on the cheeks of many of those youngsters, which I think speaks for itself.

I,then, very quickly said, well, all right, before you giggle any longer, let me say a few things to you about public welfare. And I cited a few facts, some of the statistics I've given you. I talked a little bit about rights, some of the violations of the constitutional rights of welfare clients, and, as I talked, and I talked only about 10 minutes, the eyes began to come up. And by the time I had finished, in 10 minutes, their eyes were focused on mine.

Then, the most amazing thing that I have ever witnessed began to happen. I was scheduled to speak for an hour. I was there for 4½ hours, and those kids would have kept me to midnight if I had not already jeopardized my marriage by staying as long as I had.

For over three hours, there was no time when there were not at least 15 hands in the air. And those young people, for the first time

in their lives, began to ask questions about public welfare. The questions were in different categories. Many of them were obviously personal. For example, a girl would stand up and say, I know a girl who lives with her mother, and she just had a baby. Will public welfare pay for her moving expenses if she wants to live separately from her mother? I would say, about 50% of all the questions were obviously questions about themselves. If your apartment is burned out, will public welfare help replace the furniture. Do you mean to say that we do have a right to overcoats and things like that? We didn't know that. And so on and so forth. Strictly information, informing them of their rights.

Another set of questions had to do with what can we do about this. Maybe we should organize welfare clients to bargain with the welfare system; maybe we should go to the Harlem Bar Association and get the lawyers interested in defending the rights of welfare clients in fair hearings, in the courts and elsewhere. And so they began to talk about an action strategy; and then there were a small minority of youngsters who kept saying, but we don't want to be on welfare; and I kept saying, I don't want you to be either. But let's face the fact that three year old children don't really have the choice. And the aged don't have the choice. Let's face the fact that there are a great many people who are poor, who are going to continue being poor, and they should not be made to give up their rights as citizens merely because of that fact. Well, most of that audience got that point and understood, for the first time in their lives that many of their own feelings about themselves were being engendered by a society which was stigmatizing them for being on welfare, and they were accepting that; they were not

raising their eyes, and looking society back in the eye and saying, if we had not been subjected to 100 years of discrimination, and so forth, we probably would not be on welfare; but here we are, and don't, then, say to us that we are not human beings, that we do not have simple dignity. Don't think you can any longer tramp on our rights the way you have.

Well, I suggest that the problem that we hear sc much about, of the low social esteem of low income kids, their own sense of unworth, and all that means for their failure sometimes to enter productively into the educational enterprise, has something to do with public agencies, not just with cultural deprivation, and that kind of thing. It has to do, in part, with the way the agencies of the welfare state organize and structure their services, organize and structure their transactions with low income people. If I had had, that night in Harlem, 150 copies of the Welfare Manual, I dare say, within a month's time, I could have taught everyone in that audience to read, who could not read. For, for the first time in years, something had come into their lives that was real and immediate and which also triggered their natural altruism and their natural anger. And it helped, I think, to give them a greater sense of dignity.

Well, I suggest, then, that issues of public welfare and the relationship of poor people to governmental agencies, is an issue which does have some meaning for the classroom, and I hope you will prove me right.

Discussant

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It's refreshing to hear problems of education posed within the framework of the social setting, alone in which they get fundamental meanings; because the school is, indeed, an interacting unit of the culture, reflecting its dominant values, and serving the goals which prevail in the society. If these goals be democratic, good; but if they are not democratic, they still tend to be served by our schools, which are responsive to the prevailing values of the community.

We tend sometimes, in our professional discussions to talk about the school as if it were a world apart; and, indeed, too often it seems to be. But our main problems can be understood only in terms of how the larger society of which it is a part impinges upon and affects the school. And it is probable that the solutions of our main problems in the schools, especially in this area of the education of disadvantaged children, are not to come professionally nearly so much as they may come politically. By that I mean when there emerges sufficient political force in society to bring about restructuring which will alter the character of the setting in which the school functions. Probably then, we will achieve the big solutions to which we aspire in the profession.

Dr. Cloward did not talk about one aspect of this problem in which I happen to know he is much interested. I refer to the whole question of the role of the people who are disadvantaged, if you will, not in being helped by us, but their role in forcing the institutions of our society to serve their needs with dignity and more adequacy than at present tend to prevail. And, of course, his whole discussion of the welfare institution highlights the importance of what we are talking about.

As he talked about the psychological degradation which our system of welfare tends to impose upon many poor people and their children, I could not help thinking of many school situations in which we -- harboring moralistic attitudes toward people who we say are incapable of carrying their own load and must be looked after through charity -- have re-enforced that degradation. Sometimes by overt things which are said in the classroom. Perhaps even more by our squeamishness about even mentioning it in the classroom. We don't want to offend people, our children especially; and if they are involved in something that is "bad", something that is unworthy, like living on welfare, it is something which, in their interests, we avoid even mentioning in school.

The contrary position here suggested -- I don't know a better word than the one I began using -- sounds refreshing.

If the thing which is dominant in the lives of the children in slum areas -- the economic conditions under which they live and the source of whatever income they live on -- were allowed to enter the classroom, I could see some very exciting social studies lessons, much more interesting than some I have seen about the equator and its significance for the lives and customs of people. Not only reading, which Dr. Cloward mentioned, but also some interesting arithmetic lessons, concerned with family budgets and with city budgets, in which children are probably much more interested than many of the arithmetic facts and relations we now use. But more significant perhaps than such skills and knowledges, the bringing of welfare into the classroom might yield some important social understandings, attitudes, and self-concepts. Youngsters should find school a place where welfare is not a dirty word -- not to be mentioned, or to be mentioned only with contempt -- but something which reflects inadequacies in our society, not the inadequacies of individuals caught in a system they cannot influence. In such a school setting we probably could do a great deal, not only to spur academic achievement, but in the process to enhance children's feelings of validity.

Incidentally, as this discussion proceeded, I was reminded of something that several decades of teacher education have taught me, namely, that probably the less important part of what we

give prospective teachers is <u>how</u> you go about teaching somebody, the methods. In my observations, those teachers work effectively with what we call disadvantaged children generally have methods, but also something perhaps more important. They have certain perceptions of the children they are working with that are different from those of ineffective teachers of disadvantaged children. They have certain human values and social outlooks which are genuinely democratic, which imply respect for human beings, whatever their social class or race. They have aspirations for the development of these youngsters, and confidence in their potential to develop.

We are dealing here with the emotional-value dimension of the curriculum, not merely with methods; and I think it is one of the most important aspects of education in our slum schools. Surely the whole discussion we have had on welfare and its implications for the school would tend to re-enforce such a point of view.

Finally, one could not but move toward another inference as he heard Dr. Cloward talk. We are in a period when school systems all over the country, including ours here in New York City, are preoccupied with doing something to overcome the handicaps of socially disadvantaged children. Compensatory education is now in vogue. What can we do to help overcome the scars of poverty? Now, I do not belittle such approaches at all. I think it is enormously important for our schools to try to compensate; and probably our big problem is

less what is wrong with the children than what is wrong with schools ill-adapted to their needs. But I started to say that as I listened to this discussion, I could not avoid going a step further, to the idea that perhaps the more fundamental concern is not how shall we compensate for whatever limitations there are among socially disadvantaged children, but how shall we organize a society in which there are no millions of socially disadvantaged children. Professionally, in the classroom, it may be that we can make some contribution to this end -- by the ideas we help these youngsters gain of themselves, by the meaning we give to the lives which are real about them, by avoiding practices that emphasize their alienation and their sense of personal inadequacy, by interpreting to them the nature of the society of which they are a part, and why their conditions are as they are. Professionally, I think we can make some contributions in the classroom toward a society in which masses of our children are no longer scarred by poverty. The more we give young people a sense of personal dignity, especially the poor, and the more we teach them just to read, we are giving them equipment which they can use in more effective self-help struggles, which I think are the fundamental answer to many of our problems.

Apart from what we do in the classroom, such discussions as we have had today must make most of us feel that we have important

obligations as citizens, outside the school, to do something to further the development of the kind of society in which our preoccupation need not be to overcome the handicaps and the scars imposed upon the poor, the kind of society in which we do not have millions of disadvantaged children in need of what we call compensatory education.